



LONDON HERITAGE QUARTER

### **Buckingham Gate Gardens**

The four planters on Buckingham Gate besides Wellington Barracks are owned by the Ministry of Defence but have been tended to by local residents for over ten years. One of the group members, Claude, tells us how the group came about and recalls the unique value the planters held during the COVID pandemic.

#### ***How did the group start?***

Buckingham Gate is a busy through road between Buckingham Palace and Victoria Street. For years these four raised beds off the pavement, with little depth of soil before hitting bricks and clinker, were largely unattended. A local resident, associated with Westminster Chapel, pioneered the work singlehandedly. In October 2012 I took over the task of tending these beds and turning them from a refuse dumping place to something that hopefully gives the neighbourhood some pride. This is a Sunday morning activity for our team of four volunteers. It is a truly democratic operation where discussions are had, decisions taken and then implemented. Some items such as gardening equipment are purchased and some, mainly plants, are generously donated. Victoria BID kindly provides 20 bags of compost twice a year.

#### ***What tasks do you undertake?***

The whole focus is on appearance. Sweeping and keeping the three lanes into the barracks and the front and the back path clear and clean (the Council and Military do not take responsibility for this space). Included is removing rubbish (even canine and human faeces) from the area. Pruning, planting, and yearlong weeding is our second priority. Regular mowing and strimming in the Spring / Summer. Collectively, creating, shaping, and evolving each of the beds is the most stimulating part of our job. Watering, using basic watering cans, nightly in the hot spells is also required.

#### ***Why do you do it?***

It is cathartic and gives Sunday mornings a true sense of purpose. There is huge satisfaction working with nature throughout the year. Seeing the fruits of one's labour season by season is so rewarding especially through early Spring to late Summer. Then there is the conviviality with the team but also with passers-by, tourists and dog walkers alike; during Covid the gardens were a sense of joy and companionship for many, and we built up a bank of over 40 regular 'conversationalists'!

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54 Wilton Road, London SW1V 1DE



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***What other greenspaces do you mostly tend to visit?***

St. James's Park daily; Green Park frequently and Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens regularly.

***Which is the most memorable garden you have ever visited – either in the UK or abroad – and why?***

William Robinson's Gravetye Manor gardens in Sussex; 35 acres of gardening experimentation and naturalness that surround a beautiful manor house. The walled kitchen garden supplies produce to the hotel/restaurant, while the flower gardens are to be used and enjoyed and not just spectated.

***What's the best garden tip or trick you have learned?***

Leave the grass longer before the summer begins so that in a heatwave there is less chance of it becoming merely a dustbowl.

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